

SUZUKI PIANO BASICS FOUNDATION NEWS

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To facilitate, promote, and educate the public on the way of teaching and playing the piano taught at the Talent Education Research Institute in Matsumoto, Japan by Dr. Haruko Kataoka.

Suzuki Piano Basics Foundation News

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The Sense of Accomplishment

By Dr. Haruko Kataoka

Every day from childhood, it is important for us to learn the importance of trying as hard as we can. We may choose various areas in which to practice this. In any field of endeavor, we make mistakes. But with effort to reach a goal, with persistence after repeated failures, we experience the joy of accomplishment when a goal is finally attained.

What is the role of the parent in providing this opportunity for a child? Mainly it is the parent's job to choose the appropriate field in which to have the experience of attaining a goal after hard work. Any field is fine. It could be learning music, playing an instrument, a subject from school, keeping house, etc. In any of these areas, goals may be set and, as if climbing a mountain, a child will experience the importance of each step along the way, no matter how hard it is, and will feel the joy and rewards of patience and effort in the end after reaching the goal.

In Japan there has recently been some sad news about young people. I felt very sorry for the 17-year-old who killed a few people on a chartered bus on the highway. I read in the newspaper that he said his lifetime treasure consisted only of a couple of highway receipts he had kept from trips taken with his family. Why was he not able to have a more wonderful gift from the people around him? Although he had reached the age of 17, he still thinks like a small child who is looking forward to getting something. Going for a drive was all he had to look forward to. He must have been terribly bored. And so, in order to be recognized as some sort of hero in any way he could, he ended up copying the bad examples he sees from the adults all around him. How immature he is! He did not even imagine that causing pain to others was a bad thing to do.

Another child who has become a murderer was a bright student at school, so that he did not have to study when he came home. Such an exceptional student actually lives with a great burden. If parents believe that a bright student is already a perfect human being (which actually displays a warped sense of values) and do not expose

him to the importance of achieving a goal after exerting great effort as I described above, the child grows up without any knowledge of the joy of accomplishment. He does not have to try, nor does he experience any difficulty in getting good grades. This is why he is unaware of the true joy of attaining a goal. Such a person must live with very poor thinking skills. Parents must be careful if they have a gifted child.

I have met many children like this during my long time as a piano teacher. One of my students, a boy, had parents who were great people. The student studied both piano and violin in elementary school, and then focused on piano when he attended junior high school. At the end of high school, his parents came to talk to me, since he had to quit piano in order to attend college in Tokyo. They said, *"Our son did not have to try hard in school, sports or other things. However, no matter how hard he tried to play the piano, you always scolded him and said it was not good enough. This inspired him to try harder. This process of learning piano made him realize that there are areas in life which truly require diligent effort. We really appreciate what our son learned in your piano lessons."* I received their appreciation with much gratitude.

This student is now married with children of his own. He is not a musician, but is very successful in his profession. His wife told me that it was difficult to find a place to live where he could play the piano. This made me very happy again, realizing that he was still making the piano part of his life. *(Translator's note: Living in a crowded city like Tokyo has many restrictions. Houses and apartments are so close to each other that the sound of a piano can cause serious problems in a neighborhood.)*

Another example is a seven-year-old girl. She hates to practice, but loves to perform. When I began to promise her a performance, she began practicing better than before all on her own. While preparing for the most recent concert, the practice was very hard because she was to play a very challenging piece. On the day of the concert I heard people telling her that she would get presents if she played well. Then I heard her murmur to herself, *"How can anyone play such a difficult piece well?"* She did play well, however, and got her presents and said, with a big smile, *"Oh, I was so nervous!"* In this way she was learning how to feel a sense of accomplishment.

We adults have to make an effort to nurture children so that they can become responsible, independent adults, do we not?

Children are Wonderful

By Dr. Haruko Kataoka

A boy came to his lesson today in a very bad mood. He is usually very well mannered and quiet. Today he was shouting over and over to his mother, *"Mom, you are stupid. I hate you!"* This boy is five years old, the younger of two brothers. So his mother's attention is split between the two of them, and the younger one knows when she is giving her attention to the other one. At these times he has to try to get her attention back on himself by any means possible, so he sometimes he pretends to be a really bad boy.

As I listened to him, I thought his logic to be pretty impressive. He recited, in great detail, every little thing that Mommy had done and said today that made him hate her. I listened to him until he was finally out of energy to go on. I said, *"Oh, I get it! Your mom is SO STUPID. That's why you HATE her. OK. I will take her to live at my house and that will solve your problem."*

Immediately, he said, "NO!"

Children have various ways of expressing how much they love people around them. Adults need to use good observation skills. We should not get overly excited about what they say or do. It is essential to feel the core of their hearts. When adults do not observe children in this way, children feel there is no one who understands them, and this feeling can begin to twist their pure hearts.

Suzuki Piano Basics Foundation News Deadlines

**August 15 for September/October Issue
October 15 for November/December Issue
December 14 for January/February 2001 Issue**

We would like to hear from you!

Piano Tour Group from Japan: Candid Profiles

(Web Editor's Note: If you have a world map program such as *New Millenium World Atlas* (Microsoft), open it and minimize it now. As you read the commentaries from the visiting Japanese students below, search for the cities in which they live in Japan. They travelled some 5,200 and 6,500 miles to visit Sacramento, CA and Rochester, NY respectively.)

The following students came this summer to perform at the workshops in Rochester, New York and Sacramento, California. Between the workshops these students, along with Dr. Kataoka, four other teachers from Japan, and Rochester teachers Karen Hagberg and Dorothy Drake, stopped in Las Vegas for sightseeing which was planned by Phoenix, Arizona teacher Vicki Sell and her son Brandon. Here are descriptions of themselves in their own words.

Miho Koshihara, girl, age 10, performing *Clementi, Sonatina, Op. 36, no.1. Vivace* .

I began piano lessons when I was five. I live in Matsumoto City. I like drawing, piano, Judo and volleyball. I like art also, because I like to make things. I like piano because I get to go places to perform and to hear concerts. I want to be a volleyball player or a kindergarten teacher when I grow up. When I return to Japan, I will enter a judo competition.

Syo Okuhara, boy, age 15, performing *Clementi Sonatina, Op. 36, no. 3. Spiritoso* .

I started piano five years ago. I live in Hata, near Matsumoto City. I like card games and baseball. My favorite class in school is physical education, because I get to move my body. I never had trouble with anything until I started piano lessons. In order to go to the U.S., which is my dream, I have to do piano, my weakest subject. It is torture.

Shizuka Yamazaki, girl, age 12, performing *Mozart Minuet I from 8 Minuets & Trio* .

I live in a village called Ikusaka, which is 45 minutes by car from Matsumoto. I live with my mother, father, brother and 7 dogs. I started piano when I was six. I just got a new grand piano in May. But this does not mean that I practice more. I feel happy that I can play piano whenever I learn a piece that I have seen on TV. At school I like running, and just now I am the fastest runner for the girls' 100m relay. I am surprised at myself.

Yosuke Hayashi, boy, age 10, performing *Bach Musette*.

I began piano lessons when I was three. I live in Shiojiri City. I like to use my computer. Science is my favorite subject in school because I like doing the experiments. I am glad that I can play the piano because I get to go places. When I grow up, I want to be the President of the SONY Corporation.

Mikiyasu Momose, boy, age 13, performing *Beethoven Sonata, Op. 49, no.2 Allegro ma non troppo*.

I am in Junior High School, and I started piano when I was six. I live in Matsumoto and it takes only ten minutes to go to my piano lesson on my bicycle. I like playing piano when I do well in concerts, and I think that it is very COOL when you can play well in concerts. I like soccer, and I am on a team called ASA FUTURO. I practice

soccer four days a week I like Japanese History, because I like to learn about the background of historical happenings and also to get to know the personality of the people. It is very interesting.

Natsumi Fuyama, girl, age 14, performing *Bach Minuets 1 & 2, from Partita in Bb* .

I have studied piano for five years. I live in Hotaka. I like to look at art and listen to music. I like English, math and science. I like to learn about other countries, and I want to be able to speak English. I like math because there is only one answer. I learned how to concentrate by taking piano. I can play in concerts in America. I want to be a translator when I grow up.

Makito Unno, boy, age 14, performing *Bach Gigue from Partita in Bb*.

I live in Hotaka, and I have been taking piano lessons for five years. I like basketball and video games. In school, I like P.E. and social studies. I like to move around and play ball games. I like to learn about the past. I have learned how to concentrate and how to build a strong will. Lately I have begun to like music. I have learned to perform in front of people.

Yo Okuhara, girl, age 12, performing *Haydn Sonata, no. 48, Finale*.

I have taken piano lessons for eight years. I live in Hata. I like to swim and draw pictures. I love to swim, but when I got to Junior High School I cannot swim, so I am very sad. I like home economics because I can make and cook many things. I feel good about taking piano. I get to go places and make many friends.

Mami Shinohara, girl, age 16, performing *Mendelssohn Rondo Capriccioso, Op. 14* .

I started piano lessons when I was three years old. I live in a section of Matsumoto called Imai. Now that I am in High School, I get to my lesson by train, bicycle and walking, and it takes 40 minutes. I like to play with my dog, take him for walks, and to read. I like art because I get to use my imagination. I am a very optimistic person. I want to be a police officer. I feel HAPPY when I play the piano.

Hiroo Ohtsuki, boy, age 13, performing *Chopin Ballade, no.3, Ab major, Op.47* .

I have been playing the piano for ten years. I live in Matsumoto. I like composing music, and I have composed 12 pieces. At school I like math because I have liked numbers since I was very young. I can multiply numbers with 32 digits. I like playing the piano when my friends come to listen to my concerts. Once I discovered pieces I like, I have wanted to become a pianist.

Yoichiroo Yamamoto, young man, 22, performing *Liszt Transcendental Etude, no. 10 and La Campanella*.

I have played the piano for 15 years, but there were times when I hardly practiced at all. I live in Sendai City in Miyagi Prefecture, 4 hours from Matsumoto by car. I enjoy basketball and Shyogi (Japanese chess). When I was younger, I liked math, and now I like psychology because I like to just sit down and think for a long time. I played my girlfriend a version of "Happy Birthday" which I arranged for her birthday and she was very pleased. When I am tired, I play the piano and feel relaxed; it relieves my stress. I can change the mood in a room with my playing. I want to be a psychologist. People tell me that I am cute. I like to eat well and to cook good food.

The Spirit of Dr. Suzuki Lives

**By Dr. Carolyn M. Barrett
Reston, VA**

It was with great anticipation that I attended my first session of the University of Louisville Suzuki Piano Institute 2000. I had heard and read a great deal about Dr. Haruko Kataoka but had never met her or attended any Suzuki Piano Basics Workshops before. I had studied violin with Dr. Shinichi Suzuki in Matsumoto, studied his writings and even written a book of my own on his educational methods which he had endorsed. I had been feeling at quite a loss with his leadership gone.

I had seen a lot of people going their own way, much scrambling for power, control, money; creation of intricate corporate structures, but hadn't felt any intuitive sense that my concept of the true Suzuki spirit was emanating from any of these goings on. Dr. Suzuki, in commenting on the manuscript of my book had written "*I am*

pleased that you have profound understanding of my method..." I had begun to wonder if that was really true as I couldn't seem to find my understanding of what the Suzuki Method is really all about, carrying on anywhere.

I feel that I experienced that spirit at work once again in Louisville. First I was struck by the kindness, helpfulness, and openness of the teachers at the workshop. Trainers as well as attendees were focused on learning and helping each other to learn. I got a great deal of help as a new Piano Basics learner. I have studied the first five books at other SAA training sessions but had much to learn about the diligence, exactness, precision and excellence required in Piano Basics. I remember being startled in Matsumoto when I heard Dr. Suzuki tell a student to go home and do something 10,000 times; Dr. Kataoka suggests 100,000 times!

I realized that teaching Piano Basics really does work.

This was all very reminiscent of the loving but demanding spirit that I found in Matsumoto. I had been very impressed with the sharing of "trade secrets" that I first found there, and met again in Louisville. People weren't building their own little empires but focusing on achieving success with a very exacting but extremely fruitful way to learn excellence as a pianist.

Studying with Dr. Kataoka reminded me very much of studying with Dr. Suzuki. There were occasional little asides with some very profound comments on education and the true meaning of education. There was the idea that beautiful music, exquisitely performed is ennobling to the human spirit. This is why we are pursuing excellence so diligently. There was a comment that the children who are committing mass murders in U.S. schools are a result of the violence that they see and hear all around them. The Suzuki Method advocates hearing and seeing beauty and excellence to create fine human beings. There was a concern with beauty and elegance from the sound of each note to the positioning of oneself onstage when performing. As Dr. Kataoka explained, when you are listening for the loveliness of each sound, and internalizing the techniques that create that lovely sound, it is not boring to play *Twinkle A* many hundreds of times in your learning process.

I have been working hard (researching) to implement the things I learned at Louisville in my studio and have had a rather astounding result. A mother had come to observe a group lesson to see if she wanted to enroll her children. We played only Twinkles in class that day. After class she came up to me and said they definitely wanted to join the studio. *"I have never heard Twinkles played so beautifully,"* she said. *"It brought tears to my eyes."* That brought tears to my eyes! I realized that teaching Piano Basics really does work. I also realized how lucky I was to have a parent in my studio who could distinguish beautiful sound from the very beginning. I suspect her children will do very well.

*Dr. Carolyn M. Barrett is Director of the Suzuki Music Studio in Reston, Virginia. There are approximately 60 students in the studio learning violin, viola, cello and piano. Students have concertized at President's Park Wolf Trap, Constitution Hall and the Kennedy Center. Dr. Barrett's book, **The Magic of Matsumoto: the Suzuki Method of Education**, is available through barrettc@aol.com. Dr. Barrett is Assistant Principal Viola with the Washington Symphony, and performs with the London Symphony both as violinist and violist. She is past president of the board of the Suzuki Association of the Greater Washington Area, and was Director of the Suzuki Centennial Celebration at Constitution Hall which included five piano performances as part of the gala concert. She has performed at the White House with the Washington Symphony Orchestra.*

**Getting a Grasp on the Basics
Observations from the Louisville Institute**

**by Dorothy Drake
Rochester, NY**

If you've found yourself uttering phrases like, *"Why am I doing this?, Who cares anyway?, I'm tired of working so hard, I need a break,"* or similar lines, it's time to dust off your suitcase and book a flight or hop in a car to the next Suzuki Piano Basics Workshop!

Attending a workshop will renew your spirit as well as get you thinking about those piano basics you thought were ingrained in your head forever.

Only by attending these workshops do you get support, interest, empathy and sympathy from others. Teaching piano can be a solitary job. It's a field that requires a lot of energy and time both in and out of your studio, yet the only people that really understand your lifestyle are other musicians. It only makes sense to gather with these teachers as often as possible. The following reminiscences are personal experiences and "*lessons learned*" from teachers who attended the Suzuki Piano Basics Workshop in Louisville this past June. Hey, if nothing else, you don't have to cook, clean or wake up early for a week!! Read on...

Gloria Elliott from Nebraska:

The best thing about the institute is the full and wonderful "*meal*" that I get for my ears. At home I listen to recordings of fine musicians and I attend concerts when possible, but neither compares to the experience of five days immersion in demonstrations by Dr. Kataoka. As much as I read and learn about technical skills, without excellent tone being clear in my ears, those skills are worthless. Learning to produce excellent tone is why I come to the workshop. In addition I receive "*treats*" all week. Dr. Kataoka encourages me and helps me learn how to teach better. Other teachers encourage me and share their experiences and understandings so I can learn from them as well. Bringing students to study is a bonus. They too are immersed in high quality musical sound and have lessons with teachers who can really help them (and me) understand the applications of Piano Basics. Although I am never quite "*full*," I had an excellent Five-star meal this week and have plenty to digest until my next opportunity to study.

Judy Wely from California:

Three things I learned at the Suzuki Piano Basics Workshop:

1. Keep balance and keep shoulders relaxed (down).
2. Watch wrists carefully, no waving. Just move fingers--no shaking/dancing.
3. Grasp keys for full singing tone.

Renee Eckis from Washington:

It is difficult to distinguish between what I learned and what I re-learned. I think the basic knowledge is always there. The reminders of how to apply the knowledge and to research more deeply is what I always learn and re-learn. A couple things really struck me though:

1. Together we learn. Don't try to teach but to learn together. The lesson is not directed at a child but is human to human.
2. We are probably not able to afford a \$30,000 to \$50,000 piece of jewelry but with practice we can produce a \$30,000 to \$50,000 ornament musically.
3. Research exhaling on important notes to improve tone. Deep sound is the same as breathing.
4. Everything can be accomplished through Twinkles.
5. And most important, Sensei said this with great passion and we must believe it passionately, "*Children can do anything. If the teacher makes a mistake of not believing this, the child cannot improve.*" She is repeating Dr. Suzuki's idea that we must change our way of thinking.

6. You must read the mind of the composer.

Carole Mayers from Pennsylvania:

In my own way I have adjusted to the Spartan accommodations in the dorm and have especially enjoyed late-night conversations processing the day's information or laughing or making down-up shadow puppets on the wall. I am sure there are new points I will work on with my students or in my own playing. However, what stands out are three points that are already familiar: 1. The incredible value of down-up practice which I have always loved doing. All my students with the exception of new beginners will be practicing this next week.

2. Touch-take on the key to develop fluid legato tone. Assigning this practice will be more consistent.

3. Breathing: the connection of the diaphragm and finger for good quality tone. I understand intellectually that one must breathe more for deeper tone but it is still often a mystery to experience it.

Vicki Merley from Arizona Things I've Learned in Louisville: 1. It may be called *A Short Story* but it has many chapters!

2. Have your metronome. Use it or lose it (your rhythm).

3. I've learned to accept other pianists as they are and either to hope to become as musical, relaxed and as elegant as they are or to encourage them to begin and continue--they can do it!.

Things I've Re-learned in Louisville:

1. To make goals--for myself and my students. First evaluate where I am now in my study and what I need to do to keep going forward on my progress.

2. The quickest learners need me to help them study the pieces they've quickly memorized, not just ask them to memorize more just because they can learn easily. I want them to learn quickly (and not forget quickly) but to learn by enduring.

3. "*Suzuki*" is not just playing the piano and practicing for a concert. It means to never give up--to finish what you start and to use all of yourself, body, mind, and heart--when you are doing your music and in all your life.

Vicki Seil from Arizona

This was the sixth year my son Brandon and I attended the Institute at Louisville. Watching Dr. Kataoka was amazing as usual. Her energy and dedication to each teacher and student is immeasurable. The following statements are taken from my notes:

You must be strict if you want to be first-class. Everyone should aim for first-class.

You have to want to sound like a famous opera singer.

Every day the parent should ask *Book I* students to play the left hand alone very softly. It takes sensitivity, concentration, good control and balance to play softly. It is very difficult. Playing fast or loud is easy.

It is better to do something ten times or even just once with concentration than a hundred times with no concentration.

It is never too late to change. Even the day before you die you can change if you want to. Please study and do well until the day you die!

A special thanks to all who contributed to this issue!

Please send corrections to [Kenneth Wilburn](#), Web Editor for **Suzuki Piano Basics Foundation News**.

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